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A New Approach to Time in Fashion

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Time, as traditionally understood and utilized in the fashion industry has become irrelevant due to changes in technology. The internet and many technical applications have compressed time and made seasonal or trend markers obsolete. Increasingly fashion faces issues of being inefficient and not cost effective. How might the industry adapt to this new conception of time to become more efficient, less wasteful and create a product that has greater value? How can changes in perceptions of time change the style narrative that designers use to connect to their customers?

Time in the fashion industry has traditionally been a defining factor marking eras, decades, seasons and trends. Increasingly designers have been ignoring dictates of seasonal change in the form of color, fabrics or silhouette because their brands are required to be global to survive. Time as a marker of decades has become outdated as the simulacrum of past twentieth century style has become part of the hyper-real (Baudrillard, 1996). Designers have reinterpreted past trends to the point of making styles within time obsolete. There is also no great discernable difference between fashion in the last twenty years since the goal of branding is about marking territory of a particular aesthetic or philosophy of dress rather than following any particular trend. Style websites publish work instantaneously thus compressing time and the possible impact of any style shown. Style websites and blogs catalogue work from season to season so as to be contemporaneous, nullifying ideas of one style being more or less important than the other. The multiplicity of image data that is available on the Internet means that trends and allegiance to any one social group proves to be indiscriminate. The social requirement of fitting into a social group by appearance has also faded as consumers wear what they want when they want.

A less obvious dissolution of time can also be seen in the fashion industry's practice of a fast paced cycle of retail deliveries that encourages waste and over taxes finite resources such as fossil fuels, water, and soil as well as promote unfair labor practices (Fletcher 2008; Gwilt 2014). Designers are asked to work at such a fast pace there is little chance for significant research, craft and innovation. The primary directive of fast fashion is balancing a consistent brand aesthetic while offering a sense of something new and exciting to their customer (Brown, 2009). The limited scope within a brand image from season to season guarantees brand fashion staples are consistent. To encourage consumers to be obsolescent in their purchases, retail deliveries are sometimes as often as every two weeks with novelty trend pieces. The result is consumers often wait for sales, are less motivated by trends and purchase items that they do not really need or like

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and will be more apt to throw away (Fletcher 2008; Gwilt 2014). There is increasingly less motivation to buy product at full cost as consumers buy more clothing for less money (Kunz & Garner, 2011). It would seem that the relationship of time to traditional business practices does not work anymore and only serves to cause greater problems.

The digital age we live in is dramatically altering our conceptions of the negotiation of time. What would a fashion industry look like that offered customers' specificity in what they wanted to buy and when they wanted purchase it? What would a fashion industry look like that addressed the micro trends of individual social/ interest groups rather than by blanket assumptions of age or economic status? What would a fashion brand look like that could both offer seasonally appropriate clothing and in a manner that did not encourage blind obsolescence? What if mass fashion designers were not bound by market deliveries and were able to create clothes that were innovative, sustainably produced and more efficient? So much of what sustainable practice needs to center on is methodologies that address the efficient use of resources.

Coca-Cola and McDonalds change their recipes to account for culturally geographical tastes. In a similar manner, fashion companies could install design teams in regions of the world with an overarching brand identity made specific by locality. Utilizing the speed, breadth and specificity of the internet in a more efficient way might help fashion companies to negotiate mass customization. Companies and designers that adopted this business structure could focus on real innovation unconstrained by seasonal markets promoting a greater understanding of what customers wanted or needed. Another scenario might be to place a greater emphasis on slowing time associated with labor. This creates a value for the designer, maker and the time that is represented in the final product. Financially viable Alabama Chanin and Raleigh Denim are two different price-points but both focus on the interaction of locality, the craft of making and ignoring the fast paced concerns of seasonal deliveries. In any scenario of the future, time will need to be reevaluated to address the multiplicity and diversity of contemporary life.

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